



NEWS

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California's AMBER Alert System Marks its Fifth Anniversary

Program has 100 Percent Success Rate

(SACRAMENTO) On its fifth anniversary, the California AMBER Alert program is being hailed as a total success. On July 31, 2002 California became the first state in the nation to implement a statewide alert system for abducted children.

The California Highway Patrol (CHP) was given the responsibility to coordinate the new system, but it is a partnership between law enforcement and other government agencies, broadcasters and the public. Legislation creating the AMBER Alert Network was authored by Senator George Runner (R), Antelope Valley. Local police or sheriff's departments contact the CHP to send the alerts regionally or statewide. The CHP contacts The National Weather Service which then broadcasts the message on all radio and television stations. Caltrans activates its Changeable Message Signs as well. The alerts ask the public for help in spotting the suspect, vehicle or victim.

"This is one of the best examples I've seen of government working the way it should," stated Business, Transportation & Housing Agency Secretary Dale Bonner, who oversees 13 state departments, including the CHP and Caltrans. "That's why this program has been replicated around the nation."

"The success of this program is indisputable," said CHP Commissioner Mike Brown. So far, the CHP has activated the AMBER Alert Network for 103 cases. All 131 children involved in these cases have been either rescued or found safe. "I want to commend the public, the broadcasters, Caltrans, The National Weather Service and all the police and sheriff's departments for their key roles in this tremendous life-saving program," stated Commissioner Brown.

"The success of the AMBER Alert Network is one of the most satisfying accomplishments of my career," said Senator Runner.

California was the first state to use Changeable Message Signs along freeways to notify

motorists to be on the lookout for the suspect and victim. “We know that at least nine cases were solved due to people responding to the CMS postings,” stated Caltrans Chief Deputy Director Randy Iwasaki.

Caltrans worker Milton Walters helped solve the first Amber Alert on August 1, 2002. He was flagging cars at a construction site in Kern County when he heard a radio broadcast of the Amber Alert and saw the suspect vehicle passing through the construction zone. He notified CHP and Kern County Sheriff’s officers who captured the suspect and freed the two teenage victims following a gun battle with the suspect.

“The police can’t do it all themselves. It takes the help of all 35 million Californians to keep our state safe,” noted Vacaville Police Chief Richard Word, president of the California Police Chiefs Association.

When an Amber Alert is issued programming is interrupted on all radio, television and Cable-TV channels in the effected area. “We in the broadcast industry are proud to do our part as good citizens. At least 17 of the cases were solved as a result of someone hearing the AMBER Alert on radio or television,” said California Broadcasters Association Director Stan Statham.

Law enforcement officials agree that the first three hours following an abduction are critical in bringing the case to a successful completion. The AMBER Alert program was designed to get the word out quickly to as many people as possible. “The more eyes looking for a suspect, the more likely there will be a successful outcome,” said San Benito Sheriff Curtis Hill, representing the California State Sheriffs’ Association.

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